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AUTHOR Glenn, Norval D.; Gallagher, Maggie; Blankenhorn, David, Ed.
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ABSTRACT

This report is a summary opinion of current undergraduate marriage and family textbooks. The report suggests some textbooks are deficient, erroneous, and distorted in information given about marriage. Subheadings include: (1)"Why Textbooks Matter"; (2) "The Textbook Story of Marriage"; (3) "The Dangerous Institution"; (4) "People Who Love Too Much"; (5) "Marriage as Horror Story"; (6) "Is Marriage Good for Anyone?"; (7) "Hiding the Costs of Family Disintegration"; (8) "Missing Children"; (9) "Grading the Textbooks"; and (10) "Why the Textbooks Are So Bad." Recommendations for improvement of undergraduate marriage and family textbooks are given. (LB)

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A Report to the Nation from the
Council on Families
Norval Glenn, Research Director

Closed Hearts, Closed Minds

The Textbook Story of Marriage

SO 030 525

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Institute for American Values
1841 Broadway, Suite 211
New York, New York 10023
Tel: (212) 246-3942
Fax: (212) 541-6665
Email: iav@worldnet.att.net

Closed Hearts, Closed Minds
The Textbook Story of Marriage

Executive Summary

What are we teaching the next generation about marriage?

Judging from a careful review of twenty recently published undergraduate marriage and family textbooks, the answer is: not very much. Moreover, what these students are being taught by these textbooks is probably doing them more harm than good.

First, current textbooks convey a determinedly pessimistic view of marriage. Both by what they say and, sometimes even more importantly, by the information they omit, these books repeatedly suggest that marriage is more a problem than a solution. The potential costs of marriage to adults, particularly women, often receive exaggerated treatment, while the benefits of marriage, both to individuals and society, are frequently downplayed or ignored. Second, almost all of these textbooks shortchange children, devoting far more pages to adult problems and adult relationships than to issues concerning child well-being. Third, these books are typically riddled with glaring errors, distortions of research, omissions of important data, and misattributions of scholarship.

Indeed, if these books reflect the quality of family and marriage and family courses currently offered in American colleges and universities, then the quality of these courses is no better than fair to poor.

Given the nature and extent of the deficiencies of these textbooks, many students are likely to emerge from college courses even less well-equipped than they were before to make wise personal decisions and to participate intelligently in public debates on family issues.

Just as importantly, students who use the information in these textbooks as a basis for their future decisions – as social workers, counselors, teachers, nurses, family lawyers, psychologists, and other professional custodians of the family – will have been consistently misled on important topics, from the risks of divorce to the correlates of child abuse, from the benefits of marriage to the costs of voluntary single motherhood.

In sum, these textbooks are a national embarrassment. They are both a cause and a result of a society in which marriage as an institution is growing steadily weaker. As a nation, we can surely do better. This report concludes with some recommendations for change.

Why Textbooks Matter

GENERATIONS ago, Americans turned most often to family, friends, or religious figures for advice about marriage. Today, we are increasingly dependent on an array of experts, including marriage counselors, lawyers, psychologists, teachers, therapists, popular authors, and advice columnists. Even priests and ministers are now apt to rely on the secular insights of professionals like these in their pastoral work.

But while family professionals and service providers are in one sense "experts" who rely upon an aura of scientific knowledge for their authority, they are also, by necessity, often little more than amateurs when it comes to digesting the large and growing body of social science literature pertaining to marriage, divorce, and child-rearing. For this reason, if you want to know how these professionals typically view family issues, and from where, either directly or indirectly, they are getting their basic information, the first and arguably most important place to look is today's leading textbooks on the family.

Textbooks matter in the first place, then, because they represent the distilled essence of the current conventional wisdom that informs the professionals who are the advisors and custodians of the family as an institution. Looking at what textbooks say about marriage, divorce, teen pregnancy, and unwed motherhood provides a window into the mind of this influential segment of American society.

The impact of textbooks is especially significant because the college instructors who are training the next generation of counselors, nurses, therapists, social workers, and teachers often rely on precisely these books for their own understanding of the scientific consensus on family matters, and use these books extensively to design the content of their own college courses.

The typical instructor of a marriage and family course is not a family researcher; also teaches courses on other subjects; lacks time to keep up with the research and theoretical literature on families; and thus depends largely on textbooks for knowledge of this subject matter. Instructors often adopt one textbook and use others as sources for lecture materials. The content of college family courses generally follows the template laid out in textbooks, and students are seldom exposed to theories, data, and interpretations not presented in the course books. Textbooks thus inform the teachers as well as the students of courses in marriage and the family. More broadly, because textbooks represent the conventional "expert" wisdom accepted by such a wide array of family professionals, the ideas, errors, and attitudes they contain constantly reverberate throughout the larger American culture whenever the public turns to family professionals for advice, whether in personal affairs or public policy.

Of course, in addition to their role in influencing and distilling professional opinion, these textbooks also matter in a much more obvious and direct way. Each semester, these books are used in approximately 8,000 college courses across the country and read by hundreds of thousands of college students who are likely to view them as authoritative. This is a shame. For young people who are making important decisions about their own lives, the current textbooks are as likely to mislead as to help or instruct.

Finally, consider which of these young people, after they graduate, are most likely to use and be practically influenced by what they acquired from these textbooks. The list certainly includes: elementary and high school teachers, school nurses, school psychologists and guidance counselors, child care workers, nursery school teachers, social workers serving at-risk children and families, family therapists, workers and volunteer activists in child service and child advocacy organizations, family court judges and court-appointed psychologists, family legal aid workers, youth workers from religious and community-based programs serving teenagers,

volunteer leaders in youth programs such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Sunday School and 4-H Clubs, and course instructors in community colleges and in community-based educational programs such as the Agricultural Extension Service and others.

What the professions on this list have in common is clear. These are the people who most directly affect children. After parents themselves, they are the most important hands-on nurturers, teachers, models, and advocates for our nation's children and adolescents. When we consider how we are teaching these teachers and what we model in our textbooks for these models, it is clear that they need and deserve much better than we are currently providing them.

The Textbook Story of Marriage

WHAT kind of story do today's family textbooks tell about marriage? An anthropologist from Mars who knew nothing about American families but what was contained in these textbooks would come away with several basic beliefs. First, in America, marriage is just one of many equally acceptable and equally productive adult relationships. These various relationships include cohabiting couples, divorced non-couples, stepfamilies, and gay and lesbian families. In fact, if anything, marriage as a lifelong child-rearing bond holds special dangers, particularly for women, who, if they don't find marriage physically threatening, will very likely find it psychologically stifling. Americans who suspect otherwise have had

Will Half of All Marriages End in Divorce?

"[W]e want to put this myth [that half of all marriages end in divorce] to rest. Interestingly, even professionals sometimes make this claim. Millions of Americans 'know' and believe it. It causes a lot of people anxiety as they contemplate marriage" (Lauer and Lauer, p.6).

The authors claim that this "myth" arose in part from misinterpretation of data showing a ratio of one divorce for every two marriages in recent years.

In fact, the idea that fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce comes not from such crude data but from sophisticated projections made by demographers using life-table techniques similar to, but more complicated than, those used to compute life expectancies. Such projections are not necessarily accurate predictions, but they are good summary indications of how unstable marriages were during specific periods of time.

These sophisticated projections show that between 40 and 65 percent of recent marriages in the United States will end in divorce or permanent separation.

An accurate statement is that about half of all marriages entered into in recent years in this country will end in divorce or separation if recent marital dissolution rates continue. It is already apparent that at least half of all marriages in some recent marriage cohorts will end before a spouse dies. Data from the General Social Surveys indicate that 39 percent of all first marriages (which are more stable than remarriages) entered into during the 1970s had already ended in divorce or separation before their 15th anniversary.

their brains befuddled by various "myths" which modern science has definitively refuted. Moreover, there is little evidence that divorce or unwed motherhood (with the possible exception of teen pregnancy) harms either adults or children; the more pressing danger is posed by negative stereotypes about alternate family forms, which encourage racial prejudice and may create social pressures that discourage us as individuals from freely choosing.

Family textbooks tell this particular story of marriage both by what they say and by what they fail to say.

The Dangerous Institution

The most overtly anti-marriage rhetoric is in *Changing Families*, by Judy Root Aulette. Aulette devotes three of fourteen chapters largely to marriage: "Battering and Marital Rape," "Divorce and Remarriage," and simply "Marriage," none of which contains a single mention of any beneficial consequences of marriage to individuals or society.

As an example, consider what Aulette offers students under the heading of "Theoretical Debate on Marriage":

> *Marriage is an institution that exists in some societies but not in others and varies greatly from one society to the next. Therefore, the idea and practice of monogamous marriage must have been created for the first time at some specific 'moment' in history. According to Engels, it was created for a particular purpose: to control women and children (p. 273).*

The only debate the author discusses is the one between feminists and Marxists over the precise source and nature of the oppression that marriage creates. These insights are followed up by an extended debate over whether, given "the problematic character of marriage," allowing gays to marry would constitute "the problem or the solution?" (p. 275).

The chapter summary regarding "Theoretical Debate on Marriage" sums up the flavor of Aulette's treatment:

- *Theoreticians have debated why marriage was established and what purpose it currently serves.*
- *Engels proposed that marriage was originally designed to facilitate both maintenance of class inequality and the oppression of women.*
- *His ideas have been criticized by radical, socialist, and Marxist feminists but the central argument he makes about the connection of marriage and the oppression of women is one upon which they agree (p.278).*

CONTRARY to the author's spectacular assertion that marriage exists only in some societies, marriage is a virtually universal institution. (There are a few societies about which the anthropological record is ambiguous; there is no human society in which marriage is known not to exist.) Because marriage reappears regularly in every known human society, it must fulfill beneficial functions, either for the individual or for society as a whole or both; anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists have written extensively about what the functions of marriage are. But in Aulette's textbook, the reader is given no hint that this vibrant and important conversation about the purpose of marriage as an institution even exists. Instead, the reader is left with the clear impression that there is an academic consensus that marriage originates in a desire to oppress women, and that the only debate is over the relative contributions of class and gender to that oppression.

This is no isolated flaw. Aulette's anti-marriage animus may be more explicit, but,

A Sampling of Errors

"The proportion of people today who experience the end of a marriage is not dramatically different from what it was at the end of the last century" (Aulette, p.286).

> Of course, the proportion of spouses whose marriages end, either by divorce or death, has not changed at all; it was and still is, 100 percent.

"Marriage is an institution that exists in some societies but not in others" (Aulette, p. 273).

> In fact, there is no known human society, past or present, for which there is unambiguous evidence of a lack of marriage.

almost without exception, these textbooks downplay the value of marriage, especially by what they fail to say. Not a single one of these textbooks, for instance, includes a systematic treatment of what scholars call the social functions of marriage; that is, the role of marriage historically and currently in the biological and cultural reproduction of populations and societies.

Most current marriage and family textbooks, while at times professing respect for marriage as a relationship, offer a determinedly bleak view of marriage as an institution, and especially of marriage as a morally or legally binding commitment.

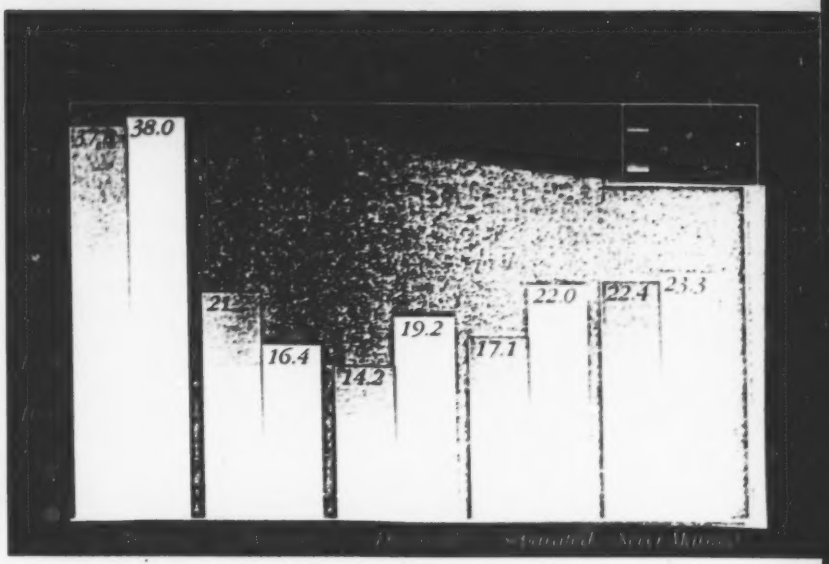
People Who Love Too Much

Consider for example, the portrait of marriage sketched by John Scanzoni. In *Contemporary Families and Relationships: Reinventing Responsibility*, Scanzoni, unlike Aulette, allows those who disagree with his fundamental premises to appear in his text, at least briefly. However, he frequently mischaracterizes the arguments of scholars concerned about family decline, seeks to trivialize their concerns, and typically ignores the scholarly literature that has produced their concerns.

Moreover, Scanzoni approves of marriage only if it is essentially stripped of role expectations, obligations, and rights. He gestures rhetorically toward the ideals of commitment and responsibility, but seems to view these only as internal emotions that place few if any limits on behavior. Thus, "commitment," in Scanzoni's view, is entirely consistent with the assertion of a unilateral right of a spouse to withdraw from marriage at any time for any reason.

In Scanzoni's schema, there are three ideological views of the family: the "fixed philosophy" outlook, which he says is held by 20 percent of the public; the opposing "process-oriented" outlook, also allegedly held by 20 percent of the public; and a "mixed" perspective that is between the two extremes.

The "fixed philosophy" school, according to Scanzoni, holds that



Source: 1990, 1991, 1993 and 1994 General Social Surveys

The data on divorced persons are a bit misleading. The main reason that the women are happier than the men is that they have been divorced longer, on the average, than the men. People recover from the effects of a divorce gradually, and because a larger percentage of men remarry (and among those who remarry, men remarry sooner), a larger percentage of the divorced men than of the divorced women are in the period right after divorce.

> *People...should start investing more 'time, money and energy in family life,' and invest less 'in themselves'...People should stop having sex – and especially stop having babies – outside of marriage. And people should get married; they should stop living together if they're not married. And they should have children. And parents should put the well-being of their children ahead of their own interests. Among other things, that means that mothers of preschoolers should stay home and take care of their children. And married couples with resident children should not divorce (p. 4).*

Scanzoni states these views in such an extreme and unqualified way that even very few traditionalists would agree with them. For instance, few people at any point on the ideological spectrum believe that couples with resident children should never divorce, even if one spouse acts violently against the other or the children. Now compare the extremist views attributed to the "fixed philosophy" outlook to Scanzoni's description of his own personal favorite, the "process-oriented" outlook. The eminently more sensible people holding this view want to

> *Invest in themselves (self-fulfillment) but they want to do so in a responsible manner. For them, "responsible" means helping (and not hurting) their partner*

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(whether spouse, cohabitor, boy-girlfriend), children, parents or other family members. It means investing in others and in oneself at the same time (p.4).

OF COURSE, it would be hard to find anyone at any point on the ideological spectrum who believes that each individual should invest only in others and not at all in oneself. By this formulation, Scanzoni conveniently typecasts those who are concerned about the decline of marriage as rigid, unattractive extremists. He also conveniently avoids all the hard questions about what "helping and not hurting" one's spouse and children might mean in the context of deciding, say, whether or not to divorce one's spouse. (After all, most spouses and almost all children find the experience of divorce an emotionally "hurtful" one.)

Apparently, in Scanzoni's universe, one can almost always indulge one's own desires without ever injuring anyone else. In Scanzoni's textbook, the possibility of actual conflict between self and others, between desires and responsibilities, between obligation to others and self-actualization, is never permitted to disturb or even inform the reader.

A main goal of this book appears to be to persuade students not to be overly committed, not to love too much, and to be especially careful not to "give" more than they "get" in marriage and in other family relationships. This is a sure recipe for marital failure.

One more example. Here, according to Scanzoni, is how religious adherents to the "process-oriented" view of marriage "take seriously the Judeo-Christian precept, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." These more enlightened people believe that "one should not love one's neighbor (partner, parent, children) more than oneself" (p. 5). Elsewhere (p. 201) Scanzoni asserts that "during the past North American wives/mothers loved their husbands and children more than they loved themselves." Presumably, these women were breaking the Biblical commandment.

Marriage as Horror Story

Other family textbooks, while avoiding Scanzoni's flawed framework, share his basic assumption that marriage is bad for women. The evidence for this surprisingly common idea rests largely on a persistently influential but now twenty-five-year-old book by the sociologist Jessie Bernard called *The Future of Marriage*.

Serious social scientists have long looked askance at the quality of the evidence that Bernard offers for her thesis that marriage is distinctly good for men, but generally harmful for women. To support this conclusion, Bernard turns to two bodies of data. First, she finds from national surveys that married men report a much higher level of personal happiness than any category of unmarried men (never-married, divorced, separated, or widowed). This fact she presents as clear evidence that marriage benefits men.

In an appendix, she reports almost identical data on women taken from the same surveys. However, she does not consider these data on women to be evidence that marriage benefits women, because, she reasons, married women only say they are happy because society expects them to say so. To call this reasoning weak would be an understatement.

Her other data deserve to be taken more seriously. A few studies have shown that some symptoms of stress, including chronic depression, occur more often among married women than among either unmarried women or married men, which does suggest that marriage is either more stressful on, or less helpful to, at least some married women when compared to men.

However, most family scholars no longer consider this evidence as supportive of Bernard's core thesis that the effects of marriage are typically opposite for men and women. A large body of earlier research as well as research conducted since Bernard's book was published has shown that married women fare better on average on most indicators of well-being than do unmarried

women, even though on some indicators the gap between married and unmarried men is larger than the gap between married and unmarried women.

MOREOVER, at least until recently, selection into and out of marriage, which affects differences in well-being between married and unmarried persons, has almost certainly been different for men and women. For example, manifestations of depression (such as staying in bed for long parts of the day) may have been more likely to be tolerated for wives than for husbands.

Nonetheless, a surprising number of current family textbooks repeat Bernard's core thesis as though it were a proven fact. For instance:

- *Bernard's investigation showed that the psychological costs of marriage were great for women (Aulette, p. 270);*
- *We do know, for instance, that marriage has an adverse effect on women's mental health (Collins and Coltrane, p. 372);*
- *If marriage is so difficult for wives, why do the majority surveyed judge themselves as happy?...[The reason] is that happiness is interpreted by wives in terms of conformity. Since they are conforming to society's expectations, this must be happiness (Baca Zinn and Eitzen, p. 253).*

More informed scholarship clearly suggests that both men and women typically

Divorce as a Substitute for Death

Several family textbooks argue that divorce rates have risen because people are living longer. "[L]ower mortality rates have led to...rising divorce rates," writes Arlene Skolnick. "People who marry in their 20s can look forward to 50 years together, mostly without young children to care for. Many researchers believe that current high divorce rates are in part a compensation for the fact that the early breakup of a marriage by death is such a remote possibility" (p. 27).

Wrong. Extended longevity can account for only a tiny fraction of the increase in divorce from 1965 to 1980 and very little of the increase before then.

Only a decline in age-specific death rates among young adults could have much actual effect on divorce, because a large majority of divorces occur among young adults. Those death rates have changed very little since mid-century. Furthermore, the increase in life expectancy due to a decline in age-specific death rates among older adults has been accompanied by an increase in the typical age at marriage, leaving the "natural" life span of marriage (excluding divorce) only moderately longer than it was earlier in the century.

Between 1940 and 1990, for example, life expectancy from the median age at marriage increased by only 4.5 years for men and 6.6 years for women. From 1960 (before the modern divorce boom began) to 1990, the increase was only 1 year for men and less than 5 months for women.

Does it really make sense to suppose that a young person in a struggling marriage will think to himself: "Since I have about 50 years left to live, I will get divorced, but if it were only 45 years, I would stay married!"

Yet of the family textbooks that discuss this "longer life span" explanation for divorce, only one (Adams, p.34) notes that the thesis is not very credible.

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benefit from marriage, physically and emotionally, and that both men and women show signs of psychological distress in the aftermath of divorce.

Is Marriage Good for Anyone?

While playing up doubtful theories about the excessive costs of marriage to women, the current generation of family textbooks shows remarkably little interest in the much more well-established evidence of the positive benefits of marriage to both sexes. No book gives more than glancing attention to the substantial research literature showing that marriage confers major psychological and emotional benefits on adults.

These findings, published in major scholarly journals, including *Journal of Marriage and the Family, American Journal of Sociology* and *Social Forces*, are amazingly consistent: married persons, both men and women, are on average considerably better off than all categories of unmarried persons (never-married, divorced, separated, and widowed) in terms of happiness, satisfaction, physical health, longevity, and most aspects of emotional health (see Gove, 1973; Gove, Style & Hughes, 1990; Hu & Goldman, 1990; Umberson, 1987).

Some of the advantages accruing to married people is due to selection: healthier, happier people are more likely to attract mates and to keep them than the mentally or physically ill. But the most sophisticated studies indicate that the effects of marital status itself are substantial, probably accounting for as much of the observed advantages as does selection. (See, for example, Daniel, 1996; Lillard & Panis, 1995.)

The best research of careful social scientists strongly suggests that marriage itself is good for people. This accumulating body of evidence has led the sociologist Linda Waite to conclude in her recent presidential address to the Population Association of America:

> *I think social scientists have an obligation to point out the benefits of marriage beyond the mostly emotional ones, which tend to push people toward marriage but may not sustain them when the honeymoon is over. We have an equally strong obligation to make policymakers aware of the stakes when they pull the policy levers that discourage marriage (Waite, 1995, p. 500).*

It is hard to think of research that is more directly relevant to students' lives or to ongoing public policy debates. Yet how much space do current textbooks devote to this evidence? Five of them have no treatment at all of marital effects on well-being. Five others devote from one sentence to less than one page to the topic. No book devotes more than 3.5 pages to the topic; the mean treatment per book is 1.25 pages.

EVEN more oddly, though the evidence indicates that marriage has positive effects for both men and women, almost half of the meager space devoted to marriage effects is taken up with discussions of how marriage hurts women, including almost all the space devoted to the topic in *Diversity in Families*, by Maxine Baca Zinn and D. Stanley Eitzen, the book with the longest treatment on the topic (pp. 251-254). It is as if these textbook writers have all tacitly agreed to wear the same blinders, causing them all to live in a strange world in which all bad things about marriage (domestic violence, marital fragility, and career costs to women) are clearly visible, but all good things about marriage are either only dimly visible or not visible at all.

For example, faced with the evidence that married people are less stressed and lonely, Kenneth J. Davidson and Newlyn B. Moore, in *Marriage and Family: Change and Continuity*, boldly conclude that

A Sampling of Errors

"One of four children is currently born out of wedlock...most of these children are born to teenage mothers" (Olson and DeFrain, p.358).

> Actually, two-thirds of the babies born out of wedlock (now 32 percent of all births) are born to women aged 20 or older.

"Divorced people were the most sexually active group in the study" (Olson and DeFrain, p. 165).

> Divorced persons are more sexually active than others only in their having a larger cumulative number of sex partners. Married persons have sex more frequently and report greater sexual satisfaction than any category of unmarried persons.

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It would be ludicrous to suggest that young adults who experience loneliness and stress should marry to alleviate their problems. Obviously, the same personal characteristics that resulted in their distressful state in singleness would also be reflected in marriage (p. 322).

These authors thus explicitly deny the possibility of any positive effects of marriage on loneliness or stress, attributing the apparent advantage that married people have in these areas entirely to the principle of selection. However, most social scientists who have studied the data believe that marriage itself accounts for a great deal of the difference in average well-being between married and unmarried persons. Indeed, loneliness is probably the negative feeling most likely to be alleviated simply by being married.

Bryan Strong and Christine DeVault, in *The Marriage and Family Experience*, do cite the health benefits of marriage. At the same time, without evidence and contrary to much of the research literature, they assert that: "Many of these same benefits [are] likely to accrue to cohabiting partners as well" (p. 414). Well, apparently not. Much of the health benefit of marriage to men, for example, appears to stem from a sudden drop in risky behavior – such as excessive drug or alcohol use – that follows from marriage, but not necessarily from cohabitation (Lillard & Waite, 1995).

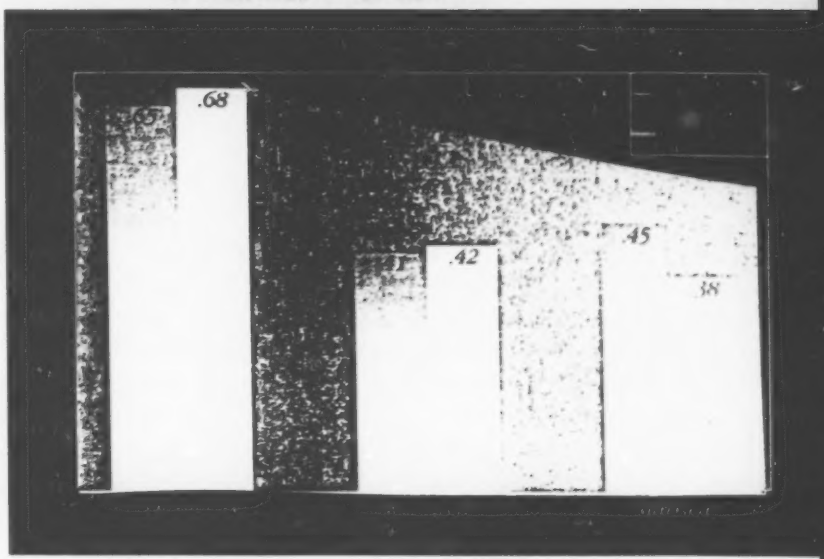
Hiding the Costs of Family Disintegration

Regarding the so-called nontraditional families – divorced, remarried, and unwed households – the filtering process employed by these textbook writers is completely reversed. Information about any possible costs to children and society from growing up outside of intact marriages enters these books, if at all, with great difficulty, and in greatly weakened form, while virtually any optimistic theory about the benefits of "family diversity" gets magnified far out of proportion to the data that generate it. Consider, for example, the relationship between family structure and juvenile misbehavior, ranging from becoming disciplinary problems at school to committing felonies. Explanations for why some children become delinquents are varied, but virtually no serious scholar would claim that family influences are unimportant. As Michael R. Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi summarize the research:

Such family measures as the percentage of the population divorced, the percentage of households headed by women, and the percentage of unattached individuals in the community are among the most powerful predictors of crime rates (p. 103).

How much space do family textbooks give to this topic? Only four books discuss it at all, and these four do so in one page, two-thirds of a page, one-sixth of a page, and three lines, respectively, for a total of less than half a page each. By way of comparison, seven out of the twenty textbooks contain discussions of "swinging" as a social lifestyle; these discussions occupy on average about two-thirds of a page each. In sum, these family textbooks are almost twice as likely to devote space to the topic of swinging, which is practiced by a minuscule portion of couples, than to the relationship between family structure and the problem of juvenile crime.

This is not an isolated example. Family textbooks display remarkably little interest in the effects of marital disruption or single par-



Source: Umberson (1987)

On every dependent variable except marijuana use, the divorced and widowed are more likely than the married to engage in negative health behaviors and less likely to experience an orderly life style (p. 313).

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enting on children, devoting an average of only 3.5 pages directly to this topic, including pictures and boxed inserts. Two books – Aulette's and *Marriage and Family: Diversity and Strengths,* by David H. Olson and John DeFrain – have no discussion at all of the topic. Scanzoni mentions the idea (in a chapter on "Divorce and Its Responsibilities") only to dismiss it: "The belief was, and still is for many people, that when adults fail to perform their roles properly, children suffer and thus the whole society is weakened" (pp. 303-4). But apparently, for Scanzoni, this belief is no longer held by intelligent people; concern for children is apparently no longer a major component of the "responsibilities" of divorce.

The books that do review at least some of the evidence of the harmful effects of divorce and solo parenting often tend to minimize the topic. In *The Intimate Environment: Exploring Marriage and the Family,* Arlene S. Skolnick's discussion of the effects of family structure on children is typical:

> *The majority of well-designed studies... find that family structure – the number of parents in the home or the fact of divorce – is not in itself the critical factor in children's well-being. In both intact and other families, what children need most is a warm, concerned relationship with at least one parent (pp. 343-4).*

This is a remarkably misleading statement, especially when presented, as it is by Skolnick, as an argument against popular and scholarly concern over recent trends in family structure. In the first place, even after controlling for a variety of factors, current research suggests that an intact marriage in itself appears to make a positive difference in a child's well-being. Intact marriages also have important indirect effects on child outcomes by strongly affecting the probability that a child will have a warm, concerned relationship with a parent. Indeed, because even the possibility, not to mention the quality, of family relationships is so obviously linked to the realities of family structure – because, to cite only one example, it is considerably harder for a child to have a "warm, concerned relationship" with her father when her father is estranged from her mother and living far away – it borders on educational malpractice to tell students that process matters, but structure does not, as if these concepts were somehow competitors for our ideological allegiance rather than descriptions of two closely interrelated aspects of family life.

CONSIDER another obvious example. Well-designed studies show that single parents, because of the pressure and stress they are under, often find it more difficult to maintain moderate, consistent discipline with their children. At the same time, children may respond to the loss of the intact family by acting out in various ways and becoming more difficult to handle, which may in turn harm the quality of the parent-child relationship. It is certainly much harder to maintain a warm parental style when you come home after a hard day's work to a pile of bills, a recalcitrant child, and messages from your child's teacher complaining about his behavior at school. Is this a problem of process, structure, or both? (Answer: both.)

Similarly, few of these textbooks give adequate attention to the considerable recent research on the ways in which stepfamilies affect children. The exact amount of space devoted to the topic is difficult to assess, because in six textbooks the discussion is intermixed with and overshadowed by a discussion of the problems of adults in stepfamilies. Six books fail even to discuss the topic, while another devotes just a single paragraph to it. Only one textbook – *Public and Private Families* by Andrew Cherlin – gives the impression that the question of how children fare in stepfamilies warrants much attention. Yet a great deal of important recent research indicates that children in stepfamilies fare at least as poorly, on average, as those in single-parent families (Booth & Dunn, 1994).

Overall, most of these textbooks remain rather dogmatically dedicated to the proposi-

tion that intact marriages are not especially important for raising children. The great majority of Americans who persist in thinking otherwise are, as these authors frequently suggest, merely ignorant. For example, here is Baca Zinn and Eitzen:

> *Those who persist in seeing the transformation of family patterns as the source of disarray, have it backwards...Divorce and single parenthood are the consequences of social problems rather than the cause as some would have us believe (p. 20).*

The 1950s, as Nijole V. Benokraitis, in *Marriages and Families: Changes, Choices, and Constraints,* hastens to assure us, "brought only a flicker of contentment to a minuscule number of white, middle-class, suburban U.S. families" (p. 17). Such ham-fisted ideological assertions are not supported by the evidence from such sources as the "Americans View Their Mental Health" surveys and the General Social Surveys, which report little change in happiness from the 1950s to the present, and little difference in psychological well-being between white middle-class suburbanites and most other Americans.

Other textbooks briefly describe competing views of family change and then argue at some length for the perspective they prefer—which turns out invariably to be the sanguine view that families are changing, not declining. For example, Mary Ann Schwartz and BarBara Marlene Scott, in *Marriages and Families: Diversity and Change,* describe "The Pessimistic View of Families" in just over half a page and "The Optimistic View of Families" in slightly less space. They then launch into "Debunking Myths About Marriages and Families," a section that continues for five and half pages and is essentially a defense of optimistic views about divorce and single motherhood. In this book,

Current family textbooks pay remarkably little attention to the benefits of marriage. Nor do they exhibit much interest in how family life affects children. Some statistical illustrations of these biases:

Pages per book focusing on the benefits of marriage for adults: less than 1.

Percent of chapters focusing primarily on how family life affects children: 7.1.

Pages per book focusing on the effects of divorce and solo parenting on children: 3.5.

Number of books that examine the relationship between family structure and juvenile delinquency: 4 of 20.

Number of books that examine "swinging" as a lifestyle: 7 of 20.

Among books that discuss the relationship between family structure and juvenile delinquency, pages per book devoted to the topic: 0.5.

Among books that discuss swinging, pages per book devoted to the topic: 0.7.

Pages per book focusing on child abuse: 7.

Pages per book focusing on adult domestic violence: 12.

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as in many others, the authors describe pejoratively as a "myth" any view of contemporary family change with which they disagree.

As a result, any future therapist, marriage counselor, minister, teacher, or family lawyer would come away from these textbooks with the distinct impression that marital disruption and unwed childbearing have few if any harmful effects on children and society.

It is not surprising, given the ongoing academic debates on the subject, that some textbooks would take this view on some particular questions. But it is a bit surprising and highly revealing that all twenty textbooks would take this view on virtually every question. The result is a textbook story that seriously downplays the important role of marriage in benefitting adults and in protecting children emotionally, financially, and academically. It suggests an "expert consensus" that is sharply at odds with much of the weight of social science evidence, as well as at odds with the conclusions of numerous leading family scholars, many of whom, in recent years, as the scholarly evidence has mounted, have largely abandoned this sanguine, 1970s-style view of contemporary family change.

Missing Children

These textbooks are characteristically uninterested in the effects of family change on children. One might expect that a major focus, if not the major focus, of family textbooks would be about the ways in which family life shapes children. Yet these twenty textbooks are overwhelmingly preoccupied with adult relationships. Just 24 of 338 total chapters in these textbooks deal primarily with family effects on children. Moreover, even in some of those chapters, up to half of the space is actually devoted to other matters. Far more space – at least three times as much – is devoted to adult relations, without regard to how they affect children.

Olson and DeFrain, for example, devote an entire chapter to the subject of "Parenthood," which cannot be classified as a chapter devoted to family effects on children, since its major focus is in fact the effects of children on parents.

SIMILARLY, current family textbooks devote nearly twice the space to family violence directed at adults, such as date rape and spousal abuse, as to child abuse and neglect. No book omits child abuse altogether, but some of the discussions are remarkably short and superficial. The two textbooks with the longest discussions of child abuse (Aulette with 12 pages and Scanzoni with 17) each devote about twice as much space to violent adult relationships (30 and 32 pages, respectively). The average amount of space devoted to child abuse is just over 7 pages, compared with a mean of over 12 pages devoted to family violence affecting adults.

Moreover, the same strange reluctance to draw any conclusions that might be construed as "pro-marriage" is also evident in these discussions of violence. Child abuse is empirically more common in certain family forms. Sexual abuse is more common in stepfamilies, for example, and child abuse and serious injury are more common in single-parent families. Surely this relationship between family structure and risks of violence is important enough to merit mention in any balanced discussion of family violence. However, less than half these books (only 8 of 20) do so.

Even those textbooks that do note the connection between family structure and child abuse fail to draw the obvious conclusion that the rapid increase in single parent families and stepfamilies has very likely increased the amount of child abuse in the

A Sampling of Errors

"People stay married out of habit, out of fear, or in about 20 percent of these [long-term, stable] marriages, because they are happy" (Olson and DeFrain, p. 453).

There is no credible evidence that only 20 percent of couples in long-term, stable marriages stay together because they are happy. It is impossible to determine precisely what the correct percentage is, but 62 percent of the respondents to the 1990-1994 General Social Surveys who were in intact marriages of 30 or more years duration reported their marriages to be "very happy."

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United States. Similarly, not one of these books suggests a strategy of reversing recent family structure trends as one path to reducing violence against children, although several equally hard-to-accomplish measures, such as reducing violence-provoking stress, sexism, racism, and poverty, are all vigorously recommended.

If family textbooks do not devote much attention to the well-being of children, it is not because space is limited. Most of these textbooks include considerable material of little or no educational value.

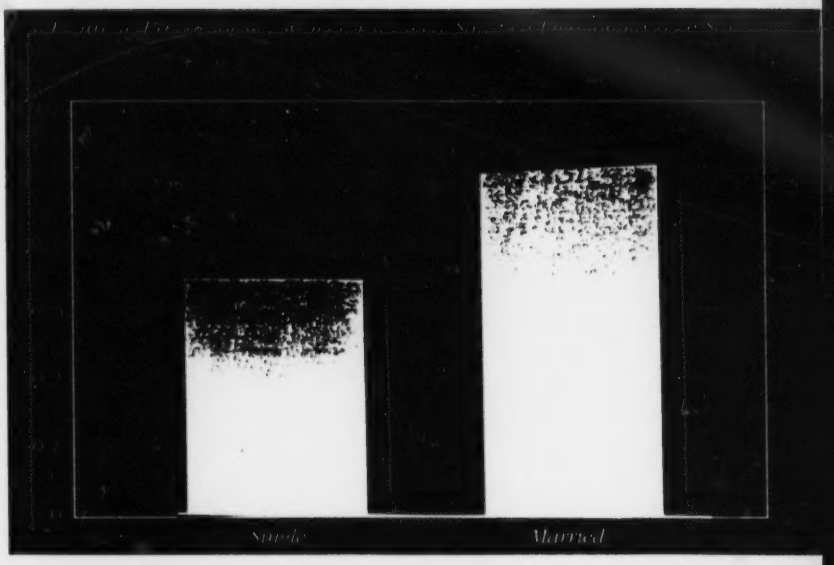
The most obvious example of wasted space is in Davidson and Moore's book, where about a fourth of most pages is blank, except for an occasional boxed insert or definition that extends into the overly wide margin. Many of the definitions, to be generous, are not very useful. Two of the terms defined are "nipple" and "penis." Anyone who reaches college without knowing the meaning of these terms is unlikely to understand the definitions given by Davidson and Moore, which in the case of "penis" is "an elongated shaft consisting of erectile tissue, nerve endings, a large supply of blood vessels, and urethra" (p. 21).

In many textbooks, much space is occupied by photos and other illustrations that add little. A feeling for the sheer banality of most textbook "art" can be gained merely from reading the captions. Consider the following examples of captions for pictures in *Contemporary Families: A Sociological View*, by Richard J. Gelles:

- *A luxury car, such as a Bentley, is a sign of the kind accumulated wealth possessed by wealthy families (p. 135);*
- *Parents who have a second child say that having two children involves more work and more fatigue (p. 271);*
- *Thinning hair or becoming bald are two signs of the significant changes men go through in middle age (p. 363).*

Or these equally trite captions for pictures in *Marriage and the Family: The Quest for Intimacy*, by Robert H. Lauer and Jeanette C. Lauer:

- *A sense of humor is one of the qualities we value in others (p. 188);*
- *Friends enjoy being with one another most of the time (p. 175);*
- *Holding hands is part of the normative behavior of dating (p. 137);*
- *Appearance is an important element in first impressions (p. 123).*



Source: Waite (1995)

Although cohabitors report levels of sexual activity as high as the married, both cohabiting women and men report lower levels of satisfaction with this activity (p. 492).

In addition, many family textbooks contain long digressions on topics only marginally related to marriage and families. Benokraitis, for example, devotes the last twelve pages of a thirty-two page chapter on "Racial-Ethnic Families" to the general problem of prejudice and discrimination, without any particular reference to marriage and families. Or, one could read the entire chapter called "The Retirement Years" in *Understanding Families: Diversity, Continuity, and Change*, by George E. Dickinson and Michael R. Leming, without ever guessing that it is part of a family textbook, since less than 5 of its 27 pages deal with family-related topics. In many of these textbooks, treatments of topics such as social inequality range far and wide, with only an indirect connection to family issues.

Grading the Textbooks

Overall, these twenty textbooks are dedicated to exploring many issues, but a balanced examination of the consequences of recent family change is not one of them.

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These books highlight the problems of marriage, both perceived and real, while essentially ignoring research on the benefits of marriage. When dealing with alternate family forms, the formula is reversed. These textbooks emphasize the strength and validity of nontraditional relationships while ignoring or downplaying important research on the long-term costs to children and to society of the decline of marriage.

None of the textbooks reviewed can be given an overall grade of "excellent" and only one – Cherlin's – can be rated as excellent in scholarship and rigorous treatment of evidence. All of the books are seriously deficient in the adequacy of their treatment of the most urgent family issues facing the nation today.

The two worst books are those by Aulette and Scanzoni, neither of which should go into a second edition. The former is little more than propaganda – so blatant a display of propaganda that it is unlikely to be adopted by any instructor who does not believe that political indoctrination is a proper function of a sociology of the family course. The latter, while adopting a pose of balance, gives a highly distorted picture of different ideological positions, and its representation of some publications is so grossly inaccurate that none of its literature review can be trusted. Although Scanzoni urges an ethic of "not hurting others," he arms students with the means to rationalize behavior that will hurt others.

Here is the bottom line. Many of the textbooks are so deficient that students who take courses in which they are used are likely to complete the courses more ill-informed about important family issues than when they began.

Why the Textbooks are So Bad

TODAY'S textbooks are almost entirely creatures of the marketplace. No outside associations, and few if any internal pressures, exercise any quality control over this key intellectual product. Effective demand for textbooks comes largely from undergraduate and community college instructors and professors, whose knowledge of the field, ironically, is highly dependent on the textbooks themselves. Academic journals rarely review textbooks; professional associations such as the American Psychological Association, the American Sociological Association, and the National Council on Family Relations also exercise little or no oversight of these books.

While most other publications by college and university faculty are evaluated by colleagues, department chairs, deans, and promotion committees, the writing and publishing of textbooks is an activity that exists largely outside of the academic oversight and rewards system. Even at teaching institutions, a scholar who writes an excellent textbook may not be furthering his or her academic reputation or career. Conversely, producing an error-filled or bias-ridden textbook will not necessarily jeopardize an academic career, since these books are usually not systematically scrutinized by those who evaluate faculty performance.

Publishers' incentives are similarly skewed. While publishers do have textbook manuscripts reviewed, these outside readers are usually undergraduate teachers rather than family scholars. While they may be well qualified to judge the appeal of books to students, or to other instructors, they are seldom in a position to detect factual errors, misrepresentations of the literature, misinterpretations of data, or other similar flaws. What these reviewers know of family research is largely drawn from other textbooks, thus creating a closed loop.

Moreover, the extremely low stipends currently offered to reviewers serve to discourage careful consideration of manuscripts. Reviewers are typically offered $200 to $250 to review as many as 400 to 500 pages of manuscript. Careful examination of a text of this size requires, at the very least,

two to three work days. In other words, conscientious reviewers must be willing to work for little more than minimum wage on a task that will in no way add to their academic prestige or further their own careers. Such conditions obviously are not conducive to careful, conscientious reviews.

An additional influence on the market for textbooks is the preferences of students themselves, who are even less qualified than their instructors to judge quality or competence. Many colleges and universities now require student evaluations of courses and use these results to make decisions about instructors' salary increases and promotions; thus, the reactions of students have a direct impact on course content and on the characteristics of textbooks.

This virtually complete surrender of textbook production to an ill-informed market does not bode well for their scientific and intellectual quality. Not only are family textbooks peculiarly vulnerable to "innocent" errors, they are also especially liable to being deformed by the authors' strong ideological biases. The direction of these biases is likely to be in one direction only: Most social and behavior scientists are liberals or radicals and only a tiny proportion are conservatives or centrists. (For data on sociologists, see Glenn, 1993.)

It may be impossible to produce a textbook that is free of ideological bias. But when all textbooks are ideologically biased in the same direction, the danger is that teachers and students will be locked in a narrow world view, lacking even the information necessary to make their own judgments.

Another victim of such ideological bias will be the work of first-rate scholars and

Grading the Textbooks: A Report Card

Book	*Balanced Treatment of Controversial Topics*	*Adequate Coverage of Crucial Topics*	*Sound Scholarship & Handling of Evidence*
Adams	B	C	B
Aulette	F	F	F
Baca Zinn and Eitzen	D	D	C
Benokraitis	B	C	B
Bird and Melville	C	D	C
Cherlin	A	C	A
Collins and Coltrane	B	C	C
Davidson and Moore	B	C	C
Dickinson and Leming	C	C	B
Eshleman	B	C	B
Gelles	C	C	B
Lamanna and Riedman	B	C	B
Lauer and Lauer	B	C	C
Olson and DeFrain	D	D	F
Rice	B	C	B
Scanzoni	F	F	F
Schwartz and Scott	C	C	B
Skolnick	D	C	B
Strong and DeVault	D	C	B
Wolf	B	C	C

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researchers, who depend heavily on lower-level instructors and their students to disseminate accurately their findings, both to the public and to the next generation of social service and therapeutic professionals. Good research has real-world implications. Yet, what good scholars do is for naught, or may even have harmful consequences, if their findings, theories, and insights are not relayed accurately to those who may base decisions upon them.

Recommendations

To College Instructors:

College teachers need to reflect more carefully on their educational mission. Is political indoctrination an appropriate goal for a college course, or should students be exposed to different points of view and taught to think for themselves? Do current courses provoke student interest in ways that contribute to or detract from basic educational goals?

Busy instructors may not be able to evaluate definitively the scholarly and intellectual quality of textbooks, but they can determine, for example, the extent to which the textbooks they use are overly adult-centered, or the extent to which they simply ignore important family issues. They can also become more aware of the need for balanced treatment of controversial topics, and can refrain from selecting production values over academic values. An overly slick production of a book is a sign of misplaced emphasis, an almost sure signal that the book should be avoided, if only because it has been made more expensive than it need be.

The key point is that publishers will produce better textbooks when college instructors demand them.

To Publishers:

Conscientious publishers can take steps now, consistent with good business practice, to improve the quality of the textbooks they produce. The most important step is to improve the reviewing process that textbook proposals and manuscripts undergo.

Enlist reputable scholars and researchers as reviewers. Too many publishing houses rely too exclusively on undergraduate teachers rather than knowledgeable scholars as reviewers, which leads to textbooks that are riddled with factual inaccuracies, misrepresentations of the literature, and misinterpretations of data. Publishers should more carefully match the qualifications of reviewers to the books reviewed. They should also increase the ideological diversity among reviewers; it is not written in stone that the ideological perspectives of reviewers should be identical to the ideological perspectives of the textbook authors.

More generally, to encourage more careful reviewing, publishers may need to increase the stipends they offer, which are currently so low as to make reviewing textbooks minimum wage work.

To trim costs, publishers could also reduce blank space, eliminate coverage of marginally relevant topics, and cut expensive frills (including color art, cartoons, and pictures) that do not illuminate important points.

To Textbook Authors:

The purpose of these textbooks is to help students understand marriage and family life. This is a goal worth remembering. Other goals, such as catering to fashion or advancing desirable political objectives, should not be allowed to

A Sampling of Errors

"In the last few decades, with the rise of cohabitation, divorce, dual-earner families, single parent families, and stepfamilies, the once-dominant nuclear family has declined in importance. To many Americans, this decline represents the decline of the family itself. Family scholars, however, offer a different perspective. They look at contemporary families in terms of change rather than decline" (Strong and DeVault, p.63).

Actually, family scholars are divided as to whether or not recent family change represents decline, and they have been, and continue to be, engaged in vigorous debate over the issue.

distract attention or reshape priorities away from the main task.

Reducing prejudice, discrediting Reaganomics, defending the welfare system, promoting gay rights, engendering sympathy for the elderly — all of these may be worthy objectives. But when they become a major focus of textbooks ostensibly devoted to disseminating social science's understanding of marriage and the family as institutions, they undermine these books' capacity to carry out their core educational mission.

To Colleges and Universities:

Administrators and faculty members could do much to improve college textbooks in general, including family textbooks. Textbooks would almost certainly be of higher quality if colleges and universities provided appropriate professional rewards for writing high quality textbooks. Department chairs, governing committees, deans, and promotion committees could work to remove the stigma from textbook writing and bring it into the realm of activities that are carefully evaluated and rewarded or punished by their institutions. If authors were subject to rewards or sanctions from their employing institutions, they would have far more incentive to resist the more perverse influences of the textbook marketplace as it is currently structured.

To Family Scholars and Researchers:

Through their professional associations, family scholars and researchers should begin developing standards for textbooks. As scholars, our life's work is disseminated largely through textbooks, and what we do is radically devalued if our findings, theories, and insights are not presented accurately to those who may use them to make decisions affecting their own lives, their families' lives, and the lives of their future clients and charges.

To Journalists, Family Professionals, Students, and Others Who May Rely on Textbooks for Information:

Question authority. Until college instructors, textbook authors, and publishers change their ways, the content of marriage and family courses at most colleges is likely to be scientifically unreliable, ideologically slanted, and missing much of the information that is necessary for any reasonable personal evaluation or public discussion regarding marriage and family life.

A Call for Better Textbooks

THIS report places much of the blame for the deficiencies of family textbooks on current market conditions, yet the fault may lie almost as much with the failures of authors and publishers to recognize an unsatisfied demand for higher quality. Clearly, many people who teach and take family courses are dissatisfied with the textbooks that are now available.

If a publisher were to produce a well written, adequately reviewed, intellectually serious, and ideologically balanced book that was not highly adult-centered and gave competent coverage to the most important family issues facing our nation, the book would almost certainly be a commercial success. It would occupy a market niche in which there is currently no competition.

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Adams, Bert N. *The Family: A Sociological Interpretation*, 5th edition. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1995. 509 pages.

Aulette, Judy Root. *Changing Families*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1994. 525 pages.

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About This Study

The criteria used by Professor Glenn in selecting books for inclusion in this study were (1) having either "marriage" or "family" in the title or subtitle, (2) having a publication date of 1994, 1995, or the first three months of 1996, and (3) being a college-level "survey" or general textbook. Twenty of the twenty-two books meeting these criteria were included in the survey. (In two cases, publishers declined to provide or sell copies of the books.) The twenty surveyed texts closely approximate the full universe of currently available and widely used textbooks in this area.

About the Council on Families

The Council on Families is comprised of eighteen nationally prominent scholars and family experts who have come together to form an on-going program of collaborative research, interdisciplinary deliberation, and public education on major issues of family well-being. The Council's mission is to examine the status of the family as a social institution and to make recommendations for the future. Members of the Council serve as unpaid volunteers who have joined together on the basis of a shared commitment to improving child and family well-being. The Council commissions and evaluates scholarly essays on a wide range of family topics and draws upon the expertise of leaders from across the nation and scholars from all branches of the human sciences. It also pursues an ambitious program of public education, regularly seeking to communicate its findings and conclusions to the wider public.

The Council's Recent Accomplishments

As the culmination of several years of collaborative research and interdisciplinary deliberation, the Council on Families released *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation* in 1995. This report summarizes the results of the Council's three-year inquiry into the status of marriage and includes the Council's recommendations for revitalizing marriage. This project represents the first time in at least a generation in which diverse family experts have come together to propose ways to strengthen marriage. Public response to the report has been strong; to date, more than 50,000 copies have been sold or distributed. As a follow-up to this report, a book of essays, *Promises to Keep: Decline and Renewal of Marriage in America*, was published in 1996 by Rowman and Littlefield. Edited by David Popenoe, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and David Blankenhorn, this book contains twelve scholarly essays on marriage that were commissioned by the Council. In addition, *Marriage in America* has been re-published as the book's final chapter. For further information about these and other publications, please contact the Institute.

Council on Families

Steven Bayme, Director, William Petschek National Jewish Family Center, American Jewish Committee, New York

Don S. Browning, Alexander Campbell Professor of Religious Ethics and the Social Sciences, University of Chicago Divinity School

Allan Carlson, President, Rockford Institute, Rockford, Illinois

Jean Bethke Elshtain (Chair of the Council on Families), Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics, University of Chicago Divinity School

William A. Galston, Professor of Public Affairs, University of Maryland at College Park

Mary Ann Glendon, Learned Hand Professor of Law, Harvard University

Norval D. Glenn, Ashbel Smith Professor of Sociology and Stiles Professor of American Studies, University of Texas at Austin

James A. Hefner, President, Tennessee Sate University at Nashville

Sylvia Ann Hewlett, President, National Parenting Association, New York

Leon R. Kass, Addie Clark Harding Professor in the College and Committee on Social Thought, University of Chicago

Thomas C. Kohler, Professor of Law, Boston University

Ray Marshall, Audre and Bernard Rapoport Centennial Chair in Economics and Public Affairs, LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin

Judith Martin, novelist and author of "Miss Manners" syndicated column and books, Washington, D.C.

David Popenoe, Professor of Sociology and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey

William Raspberry, nationally syndicated columnist for *The Washington Post*

Gloria G. Rodriguez, Founder, President, and CEO of AVANCE, San Antonio, Texas

Judith Wallerstein, Founder, Center for the Family in Transition, Corte Madera, California

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, author and social historian, Amherst, Massachusetts

Project Directors

David Blankenhorn, President, Institute for American Values

Maggie Gallagher, Affiliate Scholar, Institute for American Values

About the Institute

THE Institute for American Values is a private, nonpartisan organization devoted to research, publication, and public education on major issues of family well-being and civil society. The Institute's immediate mission is to examine the status and future of the family as a social institution. Its larger mission is to examine the sources of competence, character, and citizenship in the United States.

By providing forums for scholarly inquiry and debate, the Institute seeks to bring fresh knowledge to bear on the challenges facing families and civil society. Through its publications and other educational activities, the Institute seeks to bridge the gap between scholarship and policymaking, bringing new information to the attention of policymakers in government, opinionmakers in the media, and decisionmakers in the private sector.

The Institute is widely recognized as an important contributor to our national debate. The Institute has a staff of five and an annual budget of about $500,000. It is financed primarily by contributions from foundations, corporations, and individuals.

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